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Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its third session

Towards a pollution-free planet

We, the world's ministers of environment, having gathered at the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to work towards a pollution-free planet together with political, scientific, private sector and civil society leaders, believe that every one of us should be able to live in a clean environment. Any threat to our environment is a threat to our health, our society, our ecosystems, our economy, our security, our well-being and our very survival. That threat is already upon us: pollution is cutting short the lives of millions of people every year.

We reaffirm that our efforts to combat pollution should continue to be guided by the Rio Principles contained in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

It is imperative that we alert people everywhere to the following:

1. Every day, 9 out of 10 of us breathe air in which concentrations of air pollution exceed the limits set out in the World Health Organization's air quality guidelines and more than 17,000 people will die prematurely as a consequence. Hundreds of children below the age of five die from diseases caused by contaminated water and poor hygiene daily. Women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected, whether it be as a result of cooking with dirty fuel or walking long distances to find safe water. Every year we dump 4.8 to 12.7 million tonnes of plastic in our oceans and generate over 40 million tonnes of electronic waste – increasing every year by 4 to 5 per cent – causing severe damage to ecosystems, livelihoods and human health.

2. We believe that it is both inexcusable and preventable that tens of thousands of chemicals are used in everyday objects and applied in the field without proper testing, labelling or tracking. Far too many communities either lack information about the chemicals and hazardous substances they use and are exposed to, or the capacity to manage them safely.

3. However, we also understand that knowledge and technological solutions to reduce pollution already exist, although many stakeholders have yet to explore and implement the many opportunities available. We are encouraged by the numerous success stories of countries, cities and businesses addressing air, soil, freshwater and marine pollution issues. Recent examples of such successes include the adoption of the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and the entry into force of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

4. As countries make efforts to combat pollution in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, relevant multilateral agreements and instruments, including the Paris Agreement adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, we acknowledge the links between pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation. We further acknowledge that pollution disproportionately affects the poor and the vulnerable. Tackling pollution will contribute to sustainable development by fighting poverty, improving health, creating decent jobs, improving life below water and on land, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

5. We are concerned by the legacy of environmental damage and pollution caused by armed conflict and terrorism, often delaying recovery, undermining the achievement of sustainable development and threatening the health of people and ecosystems.

6. We are also concerned that unsustainable land use and management can lead to soil degradation and pollution and create phenomena such as forest and biodiversity loss, sand and dust storms, increasing wildfires and other undesirable effects that pose a great challenge to sustainable development.

7. We are convinced that determination, collaboration, knowledge generation and sharing, innovation, the efficient use of resources and clean technology can provide concrete solutions to tackle pollution, but that we can do more.

8. We are therefore determined to honour our undertakings to prevent, mitigate and manage the pollution of air, land and soil, fresh water and the oceans by taking the following action:

(a) We will increase research and encourage the development, collation and use of reliable scientific and disaggregated data. This will include providing better multidisciplinary indicators; improving capacity for efficient gathering, verification and monitoring of data; and increasing transparency by making it easier to access such information more widely;

(b) We will promote science-based decision-making in the public and private sectors, effective standard-setting processes by all stakeholders and greater participation by individuals from all walks of life;

(c) We will target pollution through tailored action, including environmental agreements;

(d) We will accelerate the implementation of and promote cooperation among existing multilateral agreements, conventions, regulations and programmes to prevent, control and reduce pollution;

(e) We will foster inclusive and sustainable economic productivity, innovation, job creation and environmentally sound technologies;

(f) We will encourage sustainable lifestyles and move forward in ensuring more sustainable consumption and production patterns, by providing reliable sustainability information to consumers, increasing education and awareness-raising, and making it easier to rethink, reuse, recycle, recover and remake any products, materials and/or services, and prevent and reduce waste generation;

(g) We will promote the adoption of policies and approaches such as those for the environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste, including the use of the integrated life cycle approach, value chains and sustainable chemistry;

(h) We will make the best use of science, education, policy links, trade, investment and innovation opportunities in order to tackle pollution and promote sustainable development;

(i) We will work with local government to encourage the use of sustainable models of urban development to address pollution;

(j) We will promote fiscal measures, such as incentives, to stimulate positive change, taking into account the importance of minimizing pollution and making every effort to invest in more sustainable, environmentally sound solutions;

(k) We will strengthen and enforce more integrated policies, laws, and regulations. We will achieve this by supporting institutions and building their capacity; bolstering monitoring and accountability systems; sharing best practices, standards, policy instruments and tools; and enhancing environmental education and training;

(l) We reaffirm our political commitment to creating an enabling environment to tackle pollution in the context of sustainable development and in the spirit of global partnership and

solidarity, including through adequate and predictable means of implementation as agreed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda;

(m) We will continue to develop and expand partnerships, including between Governments, the private sector, academia, relevant United Nations entities and programmes, indigenous peoples and local communities, civil society and individuals;

(n) We will promote North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, while recognizing that South-South cooperation is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North-South cooperation. We will also promote regional dialogue and coordination across the United Nations system to target pollution.

9. As ministers of environment, we recognize our role in delivering these commitments and promoting coordinated action. We will focus on preventive measures and building resilience, taking account of each country's responsibilities and capacities.

10. However, responsibility for combating pollution does not rest with national Governments alone. We need commitment and leadership from Governments and the involvement of and partnership with the private sector, international organizations, civil society and individuals. Everyone has a responsibility as a mother or father, husband or wife, sister or brother, friend, employer, colleague, neighbour or community member.

11. We cannot overstate the need for rapid, large-scale and coordinated action against pollution and we applaud the 2.3 million pledges made to date by individuals and countries of the world on action to reduce pollution in the context of the Beat Pollution campaign.

12. We support the actions and commitments of, and resolutions adopted by, the United Nations Environment Assembly and call for their adequate and coherent implementation.

13. We acknowledge the magnitude of the challenges and opportunities highlighted in the report by the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme entitled *Towards a Pollution-free Planet*.[1]

14. Moving towards a pollution-free planet is a long-term endeavour. Building on the outcomes of the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, we request the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme to prepare an implementation plan on the issue, in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives, for submission to and consideration by the Environment Assembly at its fourth session.

15. Given that addressing pollution is a crucial element for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, we will advocate for this declaration in all relevant forums, including at meetings of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, and we will follow up on its implementation at our fourth session, in 2019.

16. This is our commitment to working towards a pollution-free planet for the health and well-being of our people and the environment.

[1] A shortened version of the report is available in document UNEP/EA.3/25.